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ABSTRACT

Sixteen hundred and thirty white male adults living in the Upper Cumberland area of rural middle Tennessee were administered the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) to classify them by their degree of alcohol abuse into alcoholics, probable alcoholics, and non-alcoholics. These respondents had been referred by the courts to an educational rehabilitation program upon conviction of driving-while-intoxicated offense. Complete information from 1,477 respondents was available and analyzed regarding the subjects' religious fundamentalism, powerlessness, perceived locus of control, self-esteem, and sensation-seeking. Results indicated that the alcoholics experienced more powerlessness, attributed slightly less control to external environmental forces, and had lower senses of self-esteem than did non-alcoholics. Additionally, alcoholics were more inclined than non-alcoholics toward sensation-seeking. Implications of these results are briefly discussed within the theoretical framework of social learning. (Author/AH)

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COMPARISON OF SOME PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF MALE PROBLEM DRINKERS IN RURAL TENNESSEE*

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ABSTRACT

Sixteen hundred and thirty white male adults living in the Upper Cumberland area of rural middle Tennessee were administed the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) to classify their degree of alcohol abuse into alcoholics, probable alcoholics, and non-alcoholics. These respondents had been referred by the courts to an educational rehabilitation program upon conviction of driving-while-intoxicated (DWI) offence. Complete information from 1,477 respondents were available and analyzed as regards the subjects' religious fundamentalism, powerlessness, perceived locus of control, self-esteem, and sensation-seeking. Results indicated that the alcoholics experienced more powerlessness, attributed slightly less control to external environmental forces, and had lower senses of self-esteem than did non-alcohlics. In addition, alcoholics were more inclined than non-alcoholics toward sensation-seeking. The implications of these results are briefly discussed within the theoretical framework of social learning.

COMPARISON OF SOME PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF
MALE PROBLEM DRINKERS IN RURAL TENNESSEE

Some researchers, e.g., Lisansky (1967), have indicated that alcoholics do not constitute a single or unique personality type. On the other hand, others, e.g., McCord, McCord, and Gudeman (1960), report that alcoholics are more aggressive, dependent, in conflict with family members, and alienated from societal interaction. Probable alcoholics are found to be anxious, autonomous, aggressive and often confused over their personal role playing. Although no specific personality feature has been universally observed in alcoholic persons (Stein, Rozynko, and Pugh (1971), there is a propensity for certain traits to appear with greater incidence in alcoholism than in other psychopathological disorders. Catanzaro (1967), for example, describes 13 frequently observed characteristics of the alcoholics, including low frustration capacity, grandiosity, anxiety, guilt, perfectionism, immaturity, difficulties with authority, sex-role confusion, poor anger modulation, excessive dependency, low self-esteem, isolation, and compulsivity. Some studies have also found that young alcoholics are more maladjusted than older alcoholics (Foulds and Hassall, 1969; Rosenberg, 1969). Further, the California Psychological Inventory (Gough, 1969) has distinguished alcoholics and non-alcoholics on the socialization and self-control scales (Tarter, 1975), while alcoholics have also been differentiated from narcotic addicts on the MMPI (Overall, 1973). On the personality profile (16 PF), alcoholics were described as shrewd and radical by Brien, Kleinman, and Eisenman (1973), and as undependable, apprehensive, suspicious, and unstable by Gross (1971).

Some studies (Joe, 1971; Rotter, 1966; Butts and Chotlos, 1973) have suggested that alcoholics perceive their fates to be determined more by forces outside themselves (externally controlled) than by their own exertions (internal control). At the same time, other research has shown alcoholics to be more internally

(intrapersonally) controlled than non-alcoholics (cf. Gozali and Sloan, 1971; Goss and Morosko, 1970), with some researchers suggesting that drinking behavior can be interpreted as a means of increasing the degree of control experienced by the alcoholic over both internal and external sources of pressure (cf. Tiffany, 1967; Tiffany, Schontz, and Woll, 1969; McClelland, Davis, Kelin, and Wanner, 1972; Donovan and O'Leary, 1975). Although this model of experienced control appears theoretically consistent with the concept of perceived locus of control, very few studies have been reported correlating the measures of these two dimensions among alcoholics (cf. Costello and Manders, 1975; Donnovan and O'Leary, 1975).

The first objective of the present study is to determine if male alcoholics differ from non-alcoholics on selected personality characteristics. The second goal is to examine the degree of internal and external control experienced by alcoholics and non-alcoholics. It is hypothesized that alcoholics will experience a significantly lower degree of external control over their lives than will be the case with non-alcoholics.

METHOD

Subjects and Procedure

Sixteen hundred and thirty white male adults living in Upper Cumberland area of rural middle Tennessee who had been referred to an educational rehabilitation program by the court after a conviction of driving-while-intoxicated (DWI) offence were administered the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) (Selzer, 1971) to classify their degree of alcohol abuse into the three categories of "alcoholics," "probable alcoholics," and "non-alcoholics." The subjects were attending the educational rehabilitation program in groups of 15 to 20 persons between 1975 and 1979. During this period the subjects were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire designed to obtain such personal background information as age,

education, and measures on the personality dimensions of religious fundamentalism, powerlessness, locus of control, self-esteem, and sensation-seeking. Each of these latter dimensions are considered conceptually akin to the "locus of control" phenomenon.

Analysis was done on 1,477 completed questionnaires. Based on the results of the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test, the subjects were classified into alcoholics (n=644), probable alcoholics (n=704), and non-alcoholics (n=129). The alcoholics had a mean age of 41.7 years, the probable alcoholics mean age was 35.3 years, while the mean age of the non-alcoholics was 39.2 years. The mean education of the alcoholic, probable alcoholic, and non-alcoholic groups were 12.3, 12.6, and 12.9 years of schooling, respectively.

Materials

Responses to an 11-item "Religious Fundamentalism Scale" (e.g., "Card playing is always wrong for a Christian."), and to a 10-item "Powerlessness Scale" (e.g., "I feel that a few persons or families really control politics in this country.") were used to measure the respondents' religious orthodoxy and perceived powerlessness. Scores on the fundamentalism and powerlessness scales ranged from 11 (no orthodoxy) to 22 (high orthodoxy) and from 10 (low powerlessness) to 20 (high powerlessness), respectively.

Rotter's (1966) "Internal-External Locus of Control Scale," scored in the direction of external control, provided a measure of generalized expectancies of control. Rosenberg's 5-item "Self-Esteem Scale" (cf. Robinson and Shaver, 1976) and a 10-item "Sensation Seeking Scale" provided indirect measures of the subjects' senses of internal control.

Data Analysis

Wilks' lambda statistic (Overall and Klett, 1972; Nie, et al., 1975: 437-467), a multivariate analogue of the univariate simple randomized analysis of variance, was employed to assess the significance of difference between means for

the alcoholic, probable alcoholic, and non-alcoholic groups. The overall group difference was evaluated by an F-ratio mathematically derived from the discriminant functions. In addition, t-tests for the samples of alcoholic and non-alcoholic on each variable were employed for specific comparisons of mean scores for each of the five personality dimensions.

RESULTS

For the dimensions of religious fundamentalism, powerlessness, self-esteem, sensation-seeking, and internal-external control, the mean scores and standard deviations for alcoholics, probable alcoholics, and non-alcoholics are given in Table 1. The results of t-tests are presented to compare the mean differences between the alcoholic and non-alcoholic groups only. Although the alcoholic group did tend to score higher than the non-alcoholic group on fundamentalism, this difference was not statistically significant. On the other hand, the higher score of the alcoholics vs. the non-alcoholics on powerlessness was significant ($t=2.62$, $p<.01$), suggesting that the alcoholics experienced a higher degree of powerlessness because of their lack of control over interpersonal sources of pressure. Similarly, a relatively higher score obtained by the alcoholic group in sensation-seeking ($t=2.77$, $p<.01$) and lower score in self-esteem ($t=4.46$, $p<.001$) in comparison to the scores obtained by the non-alcoholic group, indicating that the alcoholics were more vulnerable in the area of intrapersonal sources of pressure than the non-alcoholic as the alcoholics had relatively lesser control over the internal forces.

In addition, while the stepwise discriminant analysis was applied to measure the power of these variables to differentiate the three groups: alcoholics, probable alcoholics, and non-alcoholics, only religious fundamentalism was left out, the remaining four variables have been able to differentiate the three groups (Chi-square on Wilks' lambda = 74.106, $p<.0001$). The multivariate F-ratio indicates that the alcoholic, probable alcoholic, and non-alcoholic groups

differed significantly in their overall control orientations ($F = 9.391$, $p < .0001$). Although the alcoholics and non-alcoholics generally did not differ significantly with respect to their locus of control ($t = 1.45$, $p < .20$), the statistical inclusion of this variable in the stepwise discriminant analysis indicated its substantial contribution in differentiating the alcoholic, probable alcoholic, and non-alcoholic groups. It is therefore noted, as hypothesized, that the alcoholic subjects appeared to experience a lower degree of control over both interpersonal and intrapersonal pressures than did the non-alcoholics.

DISCUSSION

The present results indicate that the male alcoholics differ significantly from non-alcoholics on the personality characteristics of powerlessness, self-esteem, and sensation-seeking. The tendency of alcoholics to score as less influenced by external forces than did either the probable- and non-alcoholics may reflect a somewhat unrealistic sense alcoholics have of being able to personally control their fate, e.g., to be able to quit drinking anytime they want to.

These results can be interpreted within the social learning framework as applied to the drinking behavior of an alcoholic population. It has been noted earlier that a relatively high degree of control over internal and external forces is related to more positive levels of psychological adjustment (cf. Tiffany, 1967). Thus, alcoholics who experience minimum control over internal and external pressures tend to be more anxious and depressed and to be less adept at coping with stress than alcoholics with higher levels of experienced control (cf. Donovan and O'Leary, 1975). It would appear that because of various socioeconomic and personality factors favoring non-alcoholics, alcoholics are generally not able to acquire the adaptive skills necessary to deal effectively with such interpersonal

and intrapersonal pressures. It is assumed that drinking may serve such a stress reducing function among alcoholics, with drinking behavior being a response reinforced by the modification of negative affective states associated with the lesser control experienced by the alcoholic. Drinking may also produce alterations in the alcoholic's cognitive set which may allow him to both perceive and experience himself as having increased control over his internal and external forces (cf. McClelland, et al., 1972).

TABLE 1
SCORES FOR PROBLEM DRINKERS ON MEASURES OF
SOME PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

Personality characteristics	Alcoholic (n=644)		Probable Alcoholic (n=704)		Non-Alcoholic (n=129)			level of significance
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	
Religious fundamentalism	18.24	3.35	18.08	3.82	17.95	3.64	.80	—
Powerlessness	15.71	2.63	15.17	2.75	15.02	2.70	2.62	$p < .01$
Self-Esteem	8.23	1.58	8.83	1.43	8.92	1.48	4.46	$p < .001$
Sensation-Seeking	15.42	2.38	15.13	2.39	14.72	2.68	2.77	$p < .01$
External Locus of Control	15.62	2.20	16.09	2.03	15.94	2.32	1.45	$p < .20$

$F(4,1242) = 9.391$, $p < .0001$

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